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ABSTRACT

This document is a teachers' compilation of instructions, step-by-step suggestions, and sample writing activities. It is designed to help the English-as-a-Second-Language (ESL) teacher teach adult English language learners who already have excellent communicative and life-skills knowledge, but who need to build better writing skills. Examples are drawn from an intensive adult ESL writing class, meeting 10-15 hours per week. These are self-selected students who have identified a lack of English writing skills as an impediment to further career advancement or to enrolling in post secondary coursework. The activities, processes, and topics described here can be successfully adapted for other levels or for non-intensive classes. Working on and sharing together these writing tasks always serves to bring the students together in a strong classroom community. (Adjunct ERIC Clearinghouse for ESL Literacy Education) (KFT)

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In Their Own Words

using student writing as a resource

VAILL ESL

1997

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REEP

FL 801391

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NOTE: The process writing activities described in this document are from my adult English as a second language (ESL) classes at the Arlington Education and Employment Program (REEP). REEP provides ESL classes to a large and diverse immigrant population in Arlington, Virginia.

The classes I teach are with students who have excellent communicative skills and lifeskills knowledge, but who need to concentrate on furthering their writing skills. These are intensive classes where students study either 10 or 15 hours a week. When students enter the class, they understand that while all skills will be addressed, the main focus on is on writing. In many cases the students themselves have identified writing as an impediment to such things as reaching a supervisory level at work or attending college or other training.

The activities and processes and topics described here can be successfully adapted for other levels or for non-intensive classes. Working and sharing together on these writing tasks always serves to bring the students together into a strong classroom community.

Steps of Process Writing

1. **Pre-writing:** Focus the student's attention on the topic:
   Pair interview using questions that reflect the outline of the essay they are going to write. I ask them **only to talk, not to write.** I do **NOT** number the questions because I don't want to encourage numbers in their papers. I want a narrative, not isolated answers to questions. I do **NOT** give them a model for the writing.

2. **Writing a first copy:**
   Give them the first sentence or two of the writing so they don't have to look at a piece of blank paper. I usually start with "My name is _____. I am from _____." The next sentence is usually the topic sentence of the essay.

3. **Peer/self response:**
   Students answer a simple questionaire to encourage reflection and evaluation about their writing **BEFORE** "revision".
   The teacher uses the students' responses in conference with each student.

   Students will finish at different times, of course. At this point, I suggest providing them with reading comprehension, punctuation, sequencing activities, etc. taken from previous students' writings on the same topic.

   These activities:
   1. **reinforce the organization before revision.**
   2. **help the teacher identify students who need special assistance with the activity**
   3. **give the teacher an opportunity to meet briefly with individual students to go over the student's paper using the evaluation form before revision.**

4. **Revision**
   Revision, to many students, means only recopy--mistakes and all. By using the evaluation form, we look for one place in the paper that could benefit by further development and suggest how s/he might tell me more.

5. **"Publishing"** is important for the students and can take a variety of forms. Student work can be posted for all to read in the classroom or on a bulletin board.

Although the teacher can handle this process by her/himself, a trained classroom volunteer is an invaluable asset on "writing" days!

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SOME CHARACTERISTICS

A GOOD TOPIC:

helps with the organization and development of the topic. It has a built-in controlling idea.

generates a wide range/variety of personal responses

adjusts to the student's ability and life experiences.

has a universal subject, but considers its audience.

gives the students have an 'out'. They can choose to take the emotional risk or not.

is something <u>you</u> might like to talk about, write about, read about.

FIVE TOPICS THAT WORK

1 MY FIRST DAY IN THE U.S.A.

Warm-up/Pre-Writing:

Think about your first day in the United States. Talk to a partner from a different country. THIS IS CONVERSATION!! NO PENCILS!!!

Exactly when did you come to the U.S.? (month,day,year,**<u>time!</u>**)
Why did you come to the U.S.?
How long did the trip take?
Who met you when you arrived?
Did you have any problems on your first day? What kind of problems?
Where did you go after you arrived?
What did you eat?
Did you sleep the first night? Why?
What was a surprise about the United States?
What did you see?
How did you feel?

Now write about your first day. Start your paper like this.

My name is _____. I am from _____. I remember my first day in the United States. I came here on _____ __, 19__ at ___:___.

I ask them to re-read and evaluate their work from day 1. The evaluation form can be as simple as asking for a yes/no answer to the Warm-up questions. For example:

Did you tell exactly when you came here?_____
Did you say why you come to the U.S.A.? _____,etc.

Followed by a few proofreading questions. For example:

Did you begin each sentence with a capital letter?____
Did you put a period at the end of each sentence?____

My First Day *is the first story that the students write. This student's response follows the 'outline'; as you can see, he is simply answering the questions in order--no risks here.*

My name is __M__. I am from the Ukraine. I remember my first day in the U.S.A. I came here on March 15, 1996 at 12:00 pm. I came to the U.S.A. because my son lives here. My trip took 11 hours. Our son met me and my wife in New York. I didn't have any problems on my first day in the U.S.A. because my son was with us. He has lived here for 4 years and speaks English very well. We went to my son's apartment and ate there different American foods. We were very tired and slept well. My biggest surprise was the absence of people on the street and very many cars. I felt confused.

But this woman really had an adventure that she wanted to share. She asked how to write conversation so she could talk about what happened.

My name is __W__. I am from Morocco. I remember the first day when I came to the United States. It was January, 1991 at 5:30 pm. I came here because my husband was here. I was thinking in the the airport while I was waiting. I was amazed because nobody was there. I was afraid and crying because I didn't speak English. Suddenly two Moroccan men brought flowers for me and told me, "Welcome, welcome," and took my bag. The men told me to come with them to answer the phone and talk to my husband. Suddenly I was surprised. It was not the voice of my husband. I put the phone down, and I told them, "Who are you?" They said, "You are not Halima?" I said, "I'm not!" Finally a woman was coming, wearing red clothes the same as my clothes.

After about one half hour, my husband came, and I told him about this story. I will never forget all my life. We went to the house and I found a table prepared with Chinese food. The first day all was different: food, sleeping, language.

This is one of my favorites, so I use it as a cloze. It appears here intact. Students would fill in blanks left in the text. After they finish the cloze, it becomes a reading comprehension activity for class or for homework.

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My name is ___M___. I am from Morocco. I remember the first day when I came to the U.S.A. It was March 22, 1994, at 5:00 pm. I was thinking in the airport while I was waiting for my friend to pick me up. Suddenly I saw a beautiful girl looking for her bags. The first look I was amazed because I never saw a girl like this in all my life. She was tall with a dancer's legs. Her hair was gold and cut short. Her eyes were the green color with long eyelashes. Her mouth was small and round. She was perfect. Truly I can't forget her all my life.

After about 15 minutes, my friend came; and I told him about this girl. But I didn't know where she was because there were many people and many stores. I felt upset when I couldn't find her. I mean I was like wild. I couldn't understand my feelings. But my friend took care of me, and we went home. That night I couldn't sleep because I was remembering this girl.

Answer in complete sentences.

1. When did ___M___ come to the United States?
2. What happened to ___M___ while he was waiting for his friend to pick him up?
3. Describe the girl.
4. How did __M__ feel when he couldn't find this girl?
5. What happened that night?
6. Do you think this is a sad story or a funny story? Tell why you think so.

#2 LETTER HOME

Warm-up/Pre-Writing

Talk to someone from a different country who speaks a different language. Take turns asking each other questions. This is conversation!! NO pencils!!

* How long have you been in the United States?
* Why did you come to the U.S.?
* What is one good thing about your life in the U.S.? Can you explain more? Why is this a good thing?
  Think about life in **your** country. What is one good thing about life in **your** country that you DON'T have in the U.S.? Please explain.
* What is one bad thing about your life in the U.S.? Would you explain? Why is this a bad thing?
  What is one bad thing about your life in **your** country? Please explain about the bad thing.
* Your friend in your country wants to come to the U.S. What will you say to your friend? Do you think your friend should come to the U.S.? Why or why not?

The assignment sheet limits the information they have discussed to 3 "paragraphs": one good thing, explain; one bad thing, explain; give advice and tell why.

Assignment sheet:

A friend in your country is thinking about coming to the United States and is asking for your advice.

Write a letter to a friend in your country. Your friend has asked you about your life in the U.S. Tell your friend about your life. Talk about one good thing about your life in the U.S. Then tell about one bad thing about your life in the U.S. After then give your friend advice to come to the U.S. or not to come to the U.S., and why.

Start your paper like this.

August 1, 1997

Dear _____,

I want to tell you about my life in the United States. One good thing is_____.

Student Response Sheet *(for the student and the teacher or for the student alone to check his/her work before revision)*

Now look at **your** letter: answer **YES or NO**
Did you put the date on the right side of the paper?_____
Did you use the name of your friend?_____
Did tell one good thing about your life?_____
Did you explain one good thing?_____
Did you tell one bad thing about your life?_____
Did you explain about one bad thing?_____
Did you give your friend advice to come to the USA or not to come to the USA?_____
Did you tell **why** your friend should come or not come?_____

A Letter Home reading comprehension for pairs.

Read this letter to your partner. Take turns reading the paragraphs to each other. Work with a partner to write the answer the questions. Check each other's work. First, number the paragraphs. Then, write the answers to the questions in complete sentences.

Dear Daniel, July 26, 1996

I want to tell you about my life in the United States. One good thing about my life is from the day I came here until today, I have had a job. I did different kinds of work. Sometimes I earned regular money, and sometimes I earned a lot of money. For 2 years I made 35,000.00 a year. That was a good time for me. I bought two cars, one for my wife and a sports car for me. I had many trips to different states. The best trip was when I went with my family to Orlando, Florida for one week, and we visited Universal Studios and Disney world. I take care of my family, and I do everything for them. I buy

everything they need. I think I have a good time in the U.S.

The other face of the coin is the bad thing in the U.S. is if you want a lot of money, you have to work day and night, seven days a week. This routine for one or two years is going to kill you. In other words, you get sick, you get nervous, you are bored, and don't want to eat. Always you are angry. That kind of disease the Americans call stress. You can earn a lot of money, but the dollar is from Americans, and the dollars have to stay here. You spend all your money, you work hard and never come to be a rich man. Always you have to pay bills and bills and more bills. And when you look in your pocket, there is nothing there.

Always I am homesick for family and friends and my own country. The bad thing of this matter is I have lost everything in my country, and I'm not sure in this country. Now I'm not American and I'm not Guatemalan either. I came here because people came before me and told me good and big things about this country. But they didn't tell me about the bad things. Now I can't go back to my country because I have lost everything there. I have to stay here now.

My friend, the good and the bad are on the table, but you decide what is better for you. The decision is in your hands. I hope you choose the best way. I miss you and good luck.

Sincerely,

Answer the questions in complete sentences.

1. In paragraph 1, what is the good thing he talks about?
   How much money did he make in one year?
   What did he buy?
   Where did he go?
2. What is the Main Idea of paragraph 2?
3. In paragraph 3 why does he feel bad?
4. In paragraph 4 what advice does he give his friend Daniel?
5. Do you agree with him about life in the United States?
   What ideas do you agree with?
   What ideas do you disagree with?

For the *Letter Home*, maybe this would be an appropriate time to practice opinion/advice/modals. For example:

Giving advice:

Why don't you_____?
Maybe you should_____.
If I were you, I would_____.
I don't think you should_____.
Maybe you could_____.
My advice is to_____.
You ought to _____.
You'd better_____.
You have to_____.
You've got to_____.
You must_____.

Or to review capital letters.

RULES FOR CAPITAL LETTERS

1. I

2. First word in the sentence

3. Names of people, places, things

Follow the rules and put capital letters in these words. Some words do <u>not</u> need capital letters.

1. school
2. me
3. english
4. united states
5. street
6. potomac river
7. dr. smith
8. toyota
9. virginia
10. columbia pike
11. tuesday
12. month
13. july
14. arlington
15. i
16. city
17. maria
18. washington redskins
19. clarendon education center
20. safeway

This letter needs capital letters and periods.

july 4, 1996

dear arely,

i want to tell you about my life in the united states one good thing about my life is that i'm working 8 hours a day at night i go to school my husband helps me with my homework in my job i have a lot of friends, and my boss is a very nice person

one bad thing about my life is my job is very hard i work as a housekeeper i clean 16 rooms every day i work 6 days every week i feel tired on my day off i have to wash my husband's clothes and my clothes after that i have to clean my house always i work i think one day i'm going to die

i would like to tell you the life is not easy in the united states the language is difficult for any job you have to learn english before you come here you have a house and a family there my advice is don't come here now

sincerely,

Checking first drafts often suggests an activity based on a common problem--distinguishing between 'too' and 'very' for example. These sentences were taken from student writing.

"You can't have too much of a good thing."

Use:	too	very	a lot
	too much	very much	a lot of
	too many	very many	

1. I worry about my job _____ .
2. I love my children _____ .
3. I have _____ friends.
4. I think about my country _____ .
5. I can't drink this coffee. It's _____ hot.
6. I can't buy a new car now. It's _____ expensive.
7. My knee hurts _____ .
8. I need _____ of things from the store.
9. Thank you. You are _____ polite.
10. I have problems with English. It's _____ difficult.

Think about your friends bad habits or your bad habits. Ask the people at your table. **Do you have any bad habits?** Write at least 5 sentences about bad habits.

My friend smokes too much.
I drink too much coffee.
She buys too many clothes.
Andre makes too many long distance calls.

***OR Sentence strips** can be used to reinforce organization*

ARRANGE THE SENTENCES IN THE CORRECT ORDER.

My name is __W__. I am from Morocco. When I was 9 years old, my best friend was named Fatima. She was fat, she had long hair, and she was very smart. When we came home from school, we played together with dolls in my home because my parents didn't like us to play outside.

Suddenly we heard music outside, and we hurried to see.

We were very afraid and crying for help from the neighbors.

One day my mother was going to a party, and she left me with my friend Fatima playing.

We took cake from the refrigerator and put four candles on the cake.

We stayed about an hour, when we returned to the house, it was terrible.

It was a man with two monkeys dancing to the city.

Finally my parents camé and gave us an unforgetable day in our rooms--no eating, no watching tv, not seeing anybody.

We turned the radio on loud; we were dancing and singing because we were having happy birthday for the dolls.

More children came to see them because it was very cute and amusing.

It was smoky because the floor was burned with candles.

Two years ago my best friend went with her family to Europe forever. I don't see her anymore.

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Other examples of lessons appropriate for my students.

changing present tense to past tense
present tense vs present continuous
common spelling errors : plurals, possessives, words with silent letters, etc.
combining their short simple sentences to form compound/complex sentences + correct punctuation
-ing(gerund) form of the verb after prepositions
sentence fragments: missing 'to be' verbs, pronoun subjects
finishing an unusual story by dictating the beginning (What do you think will happen next?) middle or ending
a good introduction/description/conclusion for them to analyze (remember the First Day blonde, with the dancer's legs?)
given a short paragraph of student writing, generate questions they would ask the writer--a lesson on development
a lesson on how to write conversation to make their writing more engaging and immediate

#3 MY CHILDHOOD FRIEND

Tell them a story about <u>your</u> childhood friend. Try to follow the outline they will use. Be sure to name your friend. Poll each student for the names of their friends. Remind them of the age limit (7 to 10).

Warm up/Pre-Writing
With a partner, talk about when you were a little kid.

When you were 7 or 8 or 9 or 10 years old,who was your best friend?
Describe your friend. (smart, tall, intelligent,funny...)
How did you meet this person?
What kinds of things did you do together?
Think about what happened one day, think about a very clear memory of something that happened to the two of you.
Tell the story of that day. Did you do something bad?
Where is your friend now? Do you still talk to or write to this person? Tell about him/her now.

Writing: Start your paper like this;
My name is _____. I am from _____. When I was a little kid, my best friend was_____.

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Student Response Sheet

READ YOUR PAPER. ANSWER THESE QUESTIONS **YES** OR **NO**. IF YOU SAY **NO** TO A QUESTION, YOU WILL NEED TO **FIX** THE PROBLEM.

PARAGRAPH 1

1. Did you tell the name of your friend?_____
2. Did you describe your friend?_____
3. Did you tell how/where you met this person?_____
4. Did you tell what kinds of things you did together?_____

PARAGRAPH 2

5. Did you tell the whole story of what happened one day?____
   Did you tell what happened at the beginning?____
   Did you tell what happened then?_____
   Did you tell what happened at the end?_____

PARAGRAPH 3

6. Did you talk about your friend now?_____
7. Did you say if you talk or write to your friend?_____

SKILLS

1. Did you indent for your three paragraphs?_____
2. Did you continue all the sentences across the page?____
3. Did you use a capital letter at the beginning of each sentence?_____
4. Did you put a period at the end of each sentence?_____
5. Did you use the past tense in paragraphs 1 and 2?_____

This student revised based on his evaluation of his first draft. The regular type shows the first draft; the *boldface italics* indicate where and how __M__ revised his first draft after the conference.

My name is __M__. I'm from Guatemala. When I was a little kid, my best friend was Erick. I can remember he was a fat boy and the same age as me, but he was bigger than me. We always met in the school and in the afternoons too. We were in many troubles.

I remember one Sunday. We planned *2 days before* to go to the Llanura Ravine. ***We met early that Sunday, and then we walked to the ravine.*** It was not too far from our house. ***When we got there about 9:00 am, we started to prepare to go down. We took a canteen with water, some rope, a small knife, gloves, clothes, and food with us. After that we started to go down. It was dangerous. We saw many strange things like plants, rocks, and insects. When we got down, we saw a big red rock. Then we went to the big red rock. We sat on the rock and had lunch. After a rest we decided to go back up. In the middle of the way, we got lost; we didn't remember the way. We were afraid. We walked and walked; it was a long walk.*** Then the night was near, and it was a little dark. I was almost crying, but suddenly we saw the top. Then we got out of the ravine. ***Then we went running to our house because it was late.*** We started our trouble at 9:00 am, and we got out about 6:30 pm. I remember our parents were worried. I'm not going to forget that day.

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Now my friend is in Guatemala. He went to the university and he is a teacher. He got married, and now he has a little girl. We communicate in a letter sometimes. I don't think he will forget that day either.

This man had a difficult childhood without school or friends, so we adjusted the topic a little to accommodate his dog.

My name is __M__. I'm from Viet Nam. My best friend was my dog Theppi. I named him Theppi because I remember one of he movies I saw in school. The movie was talking about the dog Theppi from the Soviet Union.

I remember one day my grandmother told me one of her friends wanted to give one puppy away because it was too much for the mother dog to give milk. So I went to my grandmother's house to get a dog. I still remember Theppi was the first one to jump out and lick my hand. It was so beautiful and so cute. That's why I decided to take him home.

After I brought him home, he always followed me everywhere I went. We slept together. I taught him how to shake hands and listen to what I said. He was a big dog and very smart. Most of the time he watched the cows for me because the cows always tried to run away. They knew I was just a little kid, but they knew Theppi ran better than they did.

One day on July 16, my grandmother gave a party to remember my uncle's death. We were so busy, and we forgot about him. At the end of the day I was looking for him, but I didn't find him. So everybody was worried about him. Finally one of the people who lived on the same street as we did told me that Theppi was lying next to my uncle's tomb. That time we knew that Theppi was sad, so my grandmother and I went up and we said, "Sorry," to Theppi. Then he came home.

One day I didn't know why Theppi looked sad. I knew something was not right. The next morning I woke up, and I saw Theppi lying dead. I cried and was so sad. My family didn't care at all. So I decided to bury him and make a very nice tomb, so I would always remember him.

Childhood Friend usually produces charming stories about naughty children who throw stones at bee nests or skip school or snitch money; but sometimes something else happens. I remember reading this story with the student, going over the evaluation form, and coming to the last paragraph--without any warning, an epitaph to his friend.

My name is __M__. I'm from El Salvador. When I was a little kid, my best friend was Vicente. I remember day we went to swim in the river, Vicente, my cousin and I. We put a rope on one tree and swung across the river. We went frequently to that place.

One day when we played, everybody swung to the other side of the river, and I was the last. When I took the rope to cross to the other side, the branch of the tree broke while I was passing over the river. I fell in the water, and the branch hit my head. I remember when the branch hit my head, but the rest I do not remember because I was unconscious for I do not know how long. When I woke up, I was in the

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hospital. My friend was with me, and he said, "You're okay?" I said, "I'm fine." Vicente said, "It's my fault because I said, 'Do you want to go to the river?' I'm sorry, __M__." I smiled at my friend and he smiled too. The next day I went home, and my mother said, "When you are okay, you and I will speak, okay? And I will hit you, __M__."

In 1992 my best friend died because he went into the army in El Salvador. After three months in the army, guerrillas attacked the truck where my friend was riding. Everybody died in this place. The name is Chalatenango. The guerrillas killed my best friend. I am writing this story in memory of my friend and the moments, good and bad, that we lived when we were boys.

#4 MY KEEPSAKE

Day 1

Bring in a keepsake of your own, personal and of no real value. (Students can generate questions about the object if you have time.). Share the story of your keepsake. Try to follow the outline they will use. Ask them for suggestions about what they might bring. Help those who say they have nothing. (Photos, money, flags are last resorts.) Write down what they say they will bring. Ask them to bring their keepsakes the following day. You might encourage them to wear traditional clothing if they wish. Bring your camera!

Day 2

Students show keepsakes to the class, followed by pair/small group interviews about keepsakes using warm-up questions. Photograph them individually before they start to write if you can. (Some students will forget their keepsakes; they can probably write "My Best Gift" using a similar outline; add a question about whether they still have this gift or what happened to it. Pair the "Gift" students together.)

Warm-up/Pre-Writing

Show your keepsake to the people in your group. Tell about your keepsake. Look at the other keepsakes. Ask about these things. Listen to your classmates.

What is your keepsake?
What is it made of?
What is it for?
Where/How/When did you get it?
Why is it important to you?
What do you think about and remember when you see it?

Can you think of other questions?

Now write your paper. Start like this.

My name is _____. I am from_____. My keepsake is_____.

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This writing evaluation form is by Carol Turkenik, NYU, TESOL, 1994. She suggests 2 readers for each paper. I have found that I need a quick read of the papers first to separate those that have problems. The directions are difficult for low intermediate readers, but 2 students can work through it--good negotiating goes on.

My Keepsake: Reader Response Sheet

Readers: _____

Writer_____ _____

Read the whole composition from beginning to end. If you don't understand a word or several words, ask the writer what he or she means. (Writer: pay attention to the words your reader doesn't understand. Maybe you used the wrong word(s). Maybe you misspelled the word.)

Now answer the questions.

1. Is there any part of the composition that you don't understand? UNDERLINE IT AND PUT A ? NEXT TO IT.
2. Does the writer tell you what the keepsake is?_____
3. Does the writer describe the keepsake?_____
4. Does the writer tell you where/when/how he/she got this keepsake?_____
5. Does the writer tell you why the keepsake is important?_____
6. Does the writer tell what he/she thinks about or remembers when he/she looks at the keepsake?_____

What do you want to know that the writer did not tell you?
WRITE 3 QUESTIONS TO THE WRITER TO GET MORE INFORMATION ABOUT THIS KEEPSAKE.

1._____
2._____
3._____

Composition Form:

1. Did the writer begin each sentence with a capital letter and end with a period?_____
2. Does the writing start at the left margin (side) of the paper?_____
3. Do the sentences follow one after the other (not a new line for each sentence)?_____

WHEN YOU FINISH, GIVE THIS SHEET AND THE PAPER BACK TO THE WRITER.

My name is __M__. I am from Bolivia. My keepsake is my son's shoe. The shoe is red and blue leather. In 1992 when I was putting clothes in my pack, my son Houston went to his clothes box. He said, "Open," to take the little pants and shoes and put in my pack. He thought he was coming with me. Before I came here, my wife took my son's clothes out, but she forgot one shoe.

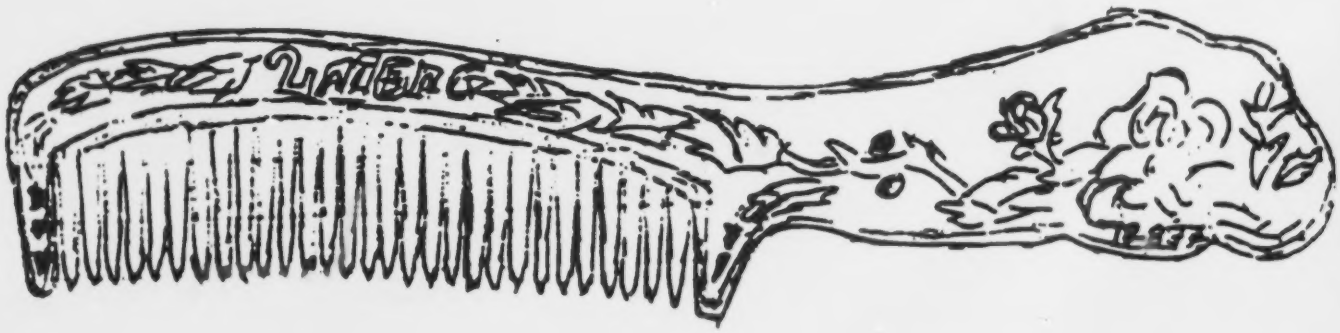
I found the shoe after I came to the United States when I opened my pack to take out letters of my sister and brother -in-law. I saw between my clothes the small shoe.

I keep the shoe. When I see this shoe, I remember my son and my family. I miss you, my wife. I love my family.

My name is __M__. I am from Vietnam. My keepsake is the aluminum comb. I was in re-education camp for five years and seven months by Vietnam Communists. I made aluminum comb in Tan-hiep camp, August 18, 1977, when I had free time.

I made the aluminum comb as a souvenir for my wife and daughter. I used a knife. I engraved rose flowers, lotus flowers, and leaves. I engraved my name and my wife's name and the date on the comb. I polished it with sandpaper. The aluminum comb was very important for me because I made it by my hands in the camp. When I see the aluminum comb, I remember being in the camp, five years and seven months.

I was scared. I was not happy. I wanted to come back to my home. I was remembering my family very very much. I went out of the camp in 1981. I and my family left Vietnam on October 7, 1991. I came together with my family in the U.S. October 12, 1991. I was very happy I came to the U.S. This place is my second country.



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My name is __W__. I am from Columbia. My keepsake is a *ruana*. A ruana is like a poncho. It is made from white wool. This is made by hand in the country by a farmer. The farmer takes the wool directly from the lambs and makes this. Somebody gave this ruana to my grandfather Pedro when he visited the country. After, he gave it to my father Alfonso, and after, he gave it to my brother Noe.

Last summer I sent my son Oscar for vacation to Columbia. He visited my mother and brothers. My older brother Noe kept this ruana, and he gave it to my son. Oscar took and wore it. They took pictures. My brother explained about the ruana: who wore it before, and what material this is, and who made it. My son took and packed and brought in his suitcase.

When I went to pick him up at the airport when he came back, I hugged and kissed him. He told me, "I brought something maybe you saw before when you were a child." I asked him, "What's that?" He smiled and told the history my brother told him. Noe grew up with that idea in his brain. Now Oscar learned from his uncle the history of the ruana.

That is important to me because he continues with our roots and secrets, and he will tell his family in the future about that. I think it was a surprise for me when I saw this special thing that I saw my father wear it. My father died; I only have his memory now, but my son will keep this valuable thing in his life forever. This keepsake is a tradition of our family life.

#5 An Experience That Changed My Life

Share a brief personal story with the class about an experience that changed your life. Try to follow the outline they will use for their stories.

Warm-up/Pre-Writing

All people have important things that happen in their lives. Some examples of important events are:

the birth of a child
a serious accident
marriage
finishing school

What are some other examples that you can think of?
(civil war; death in family; coming to the U.S.; leaving family/children behind; abuse; divorce, etc.)
Think about an experience that changed <u>your</u> life. THEN:

Ask your partner:
What happened to you?
Where did this experience happen?
Who else was there?

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When did this experience happen?
Why did this happen?/How did this happen?
How did you feel about what happened?
How did the experience change your life?
How are **YOU** different because this happened?
How is **your life** different because this happened?

You are talking to your partner to help you remember the details of what happened. Talking about your story first will help you think about your ideas and organize your experience. Remember, you are writing a story. You need to tell all about what happened. You need to use a lot of details.

Start your paper like this:

My name is _____. I am from _____. An experience that changed my life was _____

Her subject is a common one: leaving children behind and coming to the U.S. alone.

My name is __W__. I am from Peru. An experience that changed my life was when I came to the U.S., and I left my children in Peru. That happened on May 12,1970. That year was a terrible one because I left my two children and all my family. The first month in the U.S. was very bad for me. My mother and my children were in my mind. I dreamed about my children day and night.

When I left, my children were little. My son Raul was four years old, and my daughter Judith was two years old. Every minute I remembered them: when we went to my mother's house, when we were playing with the baby turkeys and picking up fresh eggs. Because my mother had a big house and two blocks of yard, she had some animals like chickens, turkeys, ducks, and rabbits. That is why we visited my mother every weekend with the children. We had a lot of places where we could play and run. I remembered when they talked to me, when they hugged me, when we ate, what they liked.

When I was walking in the road and I saw children, it was terrible for me. Then my mother started to send pictures of my children. When I had them in my hands, I just hugged them to my heart and cried and cried. I wanted to die. I was awake all night. I couldn't sleep. I was not hungry. I couldn't remember anything. Everything was confused in my mind for a long time.

Read __W's__ story and answer the questions in complete sentences.

1. What is the main idea of this story?
2. What is paragraph 2 about?
3. List 3 DETAILS about the topic of paragraph 2.
   1. 2. 3.
4. What is paragraph 3 about?
5. List 3 DETAILS about the topic of paragraph 3.
   1. 2. 3.

This student did a nice job with the comparison/contrast suggested by the topic.

My name is __M__. I am from Peru. An experience that changed my life was when I came to the United States to work. I thought the job would be easy to learn, but it was very hard.

In my country it was different. I went to high school at 7:00 am, and when I finished, I came back home and my mother cooked for me. I didn't have many responsibilities. I played soccer with my friends, and on the weekends I went to parties and discos to dance and have fun. My parents gave me everything. I didn't have to work because when I needed money, my parents gave it to me. In Peru I didn't have to worry much about my family because I saw them every day.

In this country it is very different. I have many responsibilities. It is very difficult to live here. I have to work every day Monday through Friday. I have to wake up at 5:00 am to start at 6:00. I need money to pay my rent, my food, and everything. Here I live alone. I don't have my family here. I have very little time for fun. I'm homesick because I worry about my family, and I don't have very many friends here. People here are very different from Peru. I would like to stay here 5 more years because I want to live independently, but then maybe I will go back to my country to start a business with my money.

My name is __W__. I am from El Salvador. An experience that changed my life was the civil war in my country in 1984. What happened was I think everybody knows in El Salvador. We had a war for twelve years. At that time I remember I was in school. I was very young with many dreams: first to finish my high school and then go to the university to get a good career and become a doctor. But that never came true because my country got very dangerous for everyone. Most of all for the younger people, especially for the young men because after 15 years old they were supposed to go to war and fight. I remember every morning I used to take the bus to school, but on the way the army people used to wait and stop the bus, and they picked up young men from the bus and forced them to go to the army. That was very sad because most of the people died. My father was in the army, and he knew we couldn't be there for longer, and he decided to send us to this country and keep us safe and alive. But especially for me it was very sad. I left all of them there with all those dangerous problems.

After that all my life changed. First I was younger and I was afraid to come here alone. My older sisters were here, but that was not the same for me because I needed the love of my parents. Now I have had many years here, and I haven't seen my family. Every Christmas I dream to come back home. Also Mother's Day is really sad for me. I can't hug my mother and let her know how much I love her. One day I will.

This woman struggled with the language to write her story. I was touched by the effect of the repetition, "I remember...,I remember..."

My name is __W__. I am from Eritrea. An experience that changed my life was when I was a little girl. There was a very bad war in my country, and I didn't finish my school.

I remember about the war in my country. I remember all that happened, when all the young people died and a lot of children died and old people died. I remember when we ran from the airplane. I remember when we slept outside in the rain. My experiences in the war changed my life. It broke my chance for an education. I went first to Addis, then to the Sudan, then to the U.S.A. I lost all the good things for my age.

Now I am very happy because I have my country back, and I can see my family and my country, but I am homesick when I remember my family. I always cry when I think about them.

The experience that changed my life was the war in my country El Salvador. I remember when the war started in 1979 when the guerrillas attacked the army bases for the first time. The people and the newspapers spoke of the guerrillas. I remember my grandmother said, "A lot of men will die in this conflict." My grandmother was right.

In 1985 at 9:00 am on Monday, I remember I went to the army camp because my father was working on a farm there. On the way I passed between two army bases. When I was walking by the first one, I heard a bomb explosion, and I dropped to the ground automatically. I was between the firing of the army and the guerrillas. A sargeant of the army saw that I was down. He sent somebody who drove a caterpillar where I was. When he got there, he said to me, "Stand up and come up here with me!" Then he took me back to the army base. My mother was in shock because somebody told her I was caught between the fighting.

The experience changed my life because when I go home, the first thing I think about is if the guerrillas will be in the street. In the passing of the years, I won't forget the terrible moment I had. I will always remember it. Sometimes when I am asleep, I see everything again, and I am afraid.

My name is __M__. I am from El Salvador. I remember when I was working with my uncle one day in 1988. At 4:00 pm, my uncle and I and 4 other men were delivering watermelons to the town called Los Paichiche. Three trucks of the army were travelling to another base near the town. But the guerrillas had put a bomb in the road named Agua Sarca. When the trucks passed, the bomb exploded. Two hundred and fifty men died in minutes, and we saw these men die. After that the army made a reprisal for the death of their people. The army sent 2 airplanes to bomb the valley of Agua Sarca. In 1 hour the airplanes finished with the battle in this place. Old men, women, and children died. It was terrible. Everything changes when you live and see this.